

Tuesday Night Talks - Winter, 1962-1963

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10. Is There Any Contradiction Between Being And Doing?
In What Respect? Is It Possible To Go Beyond It?

Lord Pentland - Mr. Nyland

Lord Pentland:

Is there any contradiction between Being and Doing? In what respect? Is it possible to go beyond it?

In the last weeks and months probably all of us have come to understand better that one of the tools which is available in our inner workshop is questions, questioning. And we understand that the question has to be put in the right way. It has to be put in a big way, without blunting its edge too much by defining the terms in too many words. Then the question itself and the answer can awaken me again to the one thing that is always interesting in my work, and this is the great scale of states of presence that is possible for me. I mean the sort of vertical, upwards and downwards direction, which is interesting because the same question looks entirely and miraculously different to me according to where I am in this scale. If we could try to come to these questions in that way, perhaps we can avoid the sort of argument that always seems to arise over the question of Man Cannot Do. Because we forget the relativity of our being. There is not one answer, it all depends on where I am in this scale.

Now, is there a contradiction between being and doing? Our starting point is that I don't know myself. I don't know who I am. I only know, from the truer moments, that my being is divided into many parts, and I recognize the demand in me to make myself whole, to make myself complete, so that my whole could be a part of another, altogether another, level of being. And I know that in order to make myself whole, I need the help of higher influences that come to me from above, from the planets and the sun, and that I am adapted to receive in an inner place in myself of which I am not usually conscious.

I need also to make efforts and because I don't know myself, I see that these efforts must serve my work on being. I see that the result of my efforts should be to assist the work on my being. My functions, my machine reacts, I can't make efforts by reacting. An effort would be to act. And looking at the question in my ordinary state, it seems to me as if an effort would be to make my life, my life's aims, serve, more, my work on being. That is to say, it looks as if there is no contradiction between the wish to be and the wish to do.

And so I start to work in that way. But difficult as it is to give up my life interests for what I conceive to be in the interests of my work on being, I very soon come to moments of awareness where I see that the situation is not at all what I thought it was in my ordinary state. Let me try to give this example: I decide to give up some of my time to undertake something for the sake of my work; and this needs the help of someone else. And just at the very moment that I am going to sit alone to try to find my wish for being, the telephone rings from this someone else. What shall I do? I wish to search in myself, I wish to sit alone, in order to make myself whole. At the same time, I wish to answer the telephone because in this aim also, I am, to a certain extent, completing myself - although certainly a more subjective self than the other.

If I continue in this direction with my efforts, and think about that example, I may say, then, I am trying to do but I don't know what to do. And I shall only know what to do by reinforcing my efforts to be, so that I come in touch perhaps with some higher function that could tell me what to do, that could tell me how to discriminate in my actions.

And so I turn more towards the inner work, which seems to be the work towards being. And I begin to have an aim which, as I begin to see, does not include my outer functioning at all, except to the extent that in order to come to the inner presence, I feel the need of being more free, less attached to my functions. But my functioning itself is meaningless, and so I become more and more confused. I have an aim but it doesn't seem to include the actual trace of my life on this earth among people.

And I think that maybe there are one or two of you at least who can follow me so far, and can say; that indeed there is a sort of contradiction between being and doing, in that sense. And because there is a contradiction, there is no affirmation, and so I become less and less interested in my work on being. The interest is less.

Now, in what respect? In order to know that, in order to know how I am in this contradiction, of course I need to see it more; I need to live with it. And this is the work that so many of us, I think, are attempting to do. As we have been reminded, we see how difficult it is to stay there, because it is new and there is this fear of insecurity, of something new; and also my subjective self is very close, with its impatience and its fear that if I continue to stay there, in the contradiction, I will never get anything done in time - if you see what I mean.

So I always seem to be running away from this contradiction and I don't see it. I run away in both directions. There are times when I am engaged in some activity that may not be absolutely meaningful, but yet it has for me a certain meaning, and I feel, "If I could only stop and just be, if only I could leave this and not have to try to be present when I am in the activity." And there are times when I feel, "I am getting older, and as week after week after week of this work on being goes on, is there never going to be a time when I can turn outwards and accomplish some of the work I feel I am here on this earth to do?" There is a sort of blurred vision of myself and even perhaps a kind of idea of what my destiny is - what my little part is that I am supposed to play. But I don't see it very well, and I can't wait until the picture clears. I always seem to resort to some trick to see better -- I reach out for my spectacles, so to say, and in doing so, I seem to lose the vision altogether. Also we see we have very little understanding of the idea of relativity of time in ourselves, and this gets very much in the way of any attempt to stay there, in touch with my presence, trying to study my functions. Because I am not able to find the rhythm and there is always this impatience and interference.

So, is it possible to go beyond the contradiction, or perhaps one might say, to see beyond the contradiction? In our ordinary state, in general, we must say, no. For all of us, it seems to me, it is already a big step to see the contradiction, to be aware of the contradiction, not in words but in the sense of the struggle that exists in me. And yet perhaps it may be possible to see a little bit, at a quiet moment, what things might look like, if we were beyond it. And for that, it would be necessary for me to understand what is beyond. That it doesn't necessarily mean an effort towards the higher, an effort inwards, but an effort in relation to the sense of my own presence. If I can remain with myself, follow myself in this scale, maybe a moment could come when I could be aware of the question which reaches upwards, the question about my being. I might also be able to be aware of the message that comes down, that appears in my functioning, in my mind. And I would feel these two, then, as the representatives of the two holy forces that exist in me, and that are the same holy forces that exist in all the world around me. And I would understand at that moment that it is no longer a question about my truth against the world, but that I am in the world. I don't know who I am, but I am, here, now, in the world, and everything else is there and I know the part I have to play. And I am already doing it to a certain extent. I don't know whether you can follow me. Certainly we shall lose that moment -- and we know it. We shall fall right down to the bottom of the scale to become a slave again to the subjective, illusory self. So we can't say yet that we see the way beyond the contradiction. But we can return again through questioning, and in this way my understanding of myself on the great scale of consciousness will grow.

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Mr. Nyland:

We are all alike. We are all human beings. We all have a nature which, of course, is influenced by the place we live, and we belong to Earth. This determines a certain level in our life which is our being. We have different functions, naturally; we think, at least we believe we think, we believe we feel, and we believe we can do. These are the three most important parts of one as human being.

Now, we talk about levels of being. We very often talk about life as manifested at different levels. And it is a question if actually a being exists without life. We could, for the sake of argument, assume that a stone has a being although it may be of a very low nature in life as we know it. It may not move although it may change chemically and may be affected by outside influences. Still, usually we will say it is inert. At the same time, it exists; and being, of course, means it has existence. When there is life, that is, when a stone changes, you might say, into a plant, a one-centered into an animal, a two-centered being, and a human being, a three-centered being, life changes in its aspects and its manifestations and we consider it a higher form of being. And that is as far as we can go, as far as ordinary nature is concerned. Mother nature is very satisfied with the way we are and does not want to teach us anything else.

At the same time, we are here for some other kind of purpose. When we meet, we want to talk a little bit about what are contradictions and in how far it is possible to understand a little bit more about life as we see it; and hope that if we could understand the differences between consciousness and unconsciousness, that then because of that understanding and the possibility of working, that is, the application of ideas as we can understand them, that then there is a possibility of changing this life of being into a different kind of a level which we call higher. It is probably more proper to use the kind of configurations of concentric circles or, perhaps, concentric spheres.

But, in any event, I have to have a motivation of why I become interested in work of Gurdjieff. Naturally it is that I am not entirely satisfied with the state in which ordinary human being is, and that I have questions,

and that my man number one or two or three simply continues to rotate around itself and themselves, without having any possibility or a chance to get out of it. And the level of being which is determined by the representatives as human beings on earth, apparently cannot change as long as I remain subject to the laws and different laws of this planet.

How is it then possible that I could become something else and thereby have a different level, which I call higher since it is in the direction of a possible evolution of man.

Doing belongs to a certain level of being. Doing belongs very often to that what we limit as activity in a physical way. But of course there is also a certain doing as far as a thought is concerned or also as a feeling. When I say, I do my housework or my homework, I simply mean that something in me is alive, functioning, moving about, doing this or that, and accomplishing something, and even to the point of creation of something in the direction of art, of something that did not exist before. It is still a manifestation of life which I know and I consider a doing on the basis of whatever I am. There would be contradictions if this form of doing that I know of man number one, two and three would be used for the possibility of reaching a higher level; exactly the same way to make a distinction between nature and Great Nature. And if our aim as human beings is to try to find ways of how to grow, how to become more what we should be, in the same way there is a difference between doing and Great Doing. And it is this Great Doing that becomes so important although it is rather difficult to define it.

On the level on which we are, we are subjective. We have very few moments of an objectivity regarding ourselves. By accident possibly we have experiences of that kind, but there are so few in a life time, that it will not help us to develop anything because of the experience of objectivity.

The reason why objectivity is necessary for reaching another kind of a level - that is an entirely different kind of a question. We will assume that we wish to grow and that the only way by which we can grow is to wake up to the fact that we exist in a subjective manner;

and that, for us, it is necessary first to become acquainted with ourselves as we are, and then to try to apply an idea of objectivity regarding ourselves in order to reach a different kind of a level.

This manner of doing, that is, as expressed in the wish to become something what we are not now, and for which we have to make an effort, is a different kind of doing from our ordinary life although the intensity, the motivating forces which are behind it, are the same.

The purpose is different. And because of that difference of purpose, the doing becomes different because it is in line with reaching a different kind of level. And the consciousness that could be achieved in that way belongs also to a different level of being. We do not have to explain how high that level is as long as it is from, or in, a direction away from what we are at the present time. And in the terminology of Ouspensky, we would call it "trying to become man number four, five, six or seven." Or, to say it in other words, our real aim, realizing our unconscious state, is to become conscious, even with very slow steps and gradually, and learning as we go along. Then that kind of doing becomes, as it were, sanctified, because of the purpose of wishing to become a conscious man.

The result of this understanding in ourselves, on the level in which we are, can be represented by the knowledge of work and the knowledge of the method, the knowledge of what is involved in trying to become conscious, in the sense of trying to wake up and in trying to remain,--as long as one can and as intensively as one can, to remain impartial.

If that is one's aim and, once and for all, has become such an aim that it is part of one's life, then there is the possibility that our life can be expressed in a different way and that we do not need as much the expressions which we now, in general, represent by being man number one, two or three, but that there might be a possibility that life could exist on a different kind of a level, with us there also, manifesting then in a different way. And we call it simply: to lead more a conscious life.

That what we, at the present time know, how to work and what to do, if applied in our physical ordinary doing in our physical center, that is, establishing a relationship between the knowledge which we have of what is required in order to wake up and to make an attempt to continue to remain awake and aware, this application in the physical sense, and perhaps later on as applied to our feeling functions or even intellectual functions, can produce, by means of that kind of an experience, a certain understanding which is not of this level but of a different kind. That is the understanding which then belongs to a level of being where that being can exist and again manifest in a certain way - but quite different from the level of earth. And this should be our aim.

In that sense, there is no contradiction at all between being and doing when doing is understood as belonging to the level of whichever being I am talking about. And it is the understanding of the differences of different levels that really will make us realize what are we doing, in what way, where does this doing belong, and in what respect can doing in itself also be sanctified for the purpose of what we really are trying to live for or trying to reach: the understanding for the meaning and aim of our life as we, at the present time, can accept it.

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Mrs. Fitzgerald:
(Welch Group IV)

I wish to understand better the nature of the questioning, and whether it has to do with disbelief in my ordinary explanations, which prevents me from seeing myself as I am.

Mr. Nyland:

It was difficult for us to understand what you said because we didn't hear it. Could you repeat it perhaps - stand up if you can, it will be easier.

Mrs. Fitzgerald:

I am interested in the nature of the questioning. I wondered if it would have to do with disbelief in my ordinary explanations to myself which prevents me from seeing what I am really like.

Lord Pentland:

Yes, I think you are right. I think that we all feel that most often even the questions that we are given, which are special questions, have to be used exactly as they are given. These questions stop at a very superficial level because of this belief in the false explanations that you mentioned. But when you say you believe in these explanations, you don't mean that all of you believes. Our being is divided, and there is part of you, somewhere, that can doubt these explanations, something that can admit the question, allow it to penetrate through the explanations. That is how the question works. It has to be put more often, and there has to be no forcing of it. But in putting it at different times and in different inner conditions I will see that I get all sorts of different answers and some of them come from a deeper and truer level. Of course, I don't expect any final answer because of this very question of being and doing. In a way, all my functions have, as it were, two sides. A side that is sort of directed inwards that can be recognized in some central place in myself - this is that kind of energy. And the side that is directed outwards which leaves its trace in the world. And that would be true of all functions you can think of, even the highest kind of functions. They exist in the world, and they have a meaning to myself, if this meaning can be gathered in myself. And so there is hardly any question to which you can expect one answer. And this could be a guide to our understanding in our questioning.

Mrs. Owens:
(W. Nyland Group I)

My question has to do with Partkdolg-duty. It would seem that there is a doing in the form of conscious labor that is required to fulfill Partkdolg-duty. Could that be understood as the doing of being? Or would it be the doing in order to reach a higher level of being?

Mr. Nyland:

A good answer would require a little bit more detail. I think that conscious labor and intentional suffering belong totally to a method of how to reach consciousness. I think there are other things that are more important which can be considered as steps - and even the steps are, in relation to what has to proceed, again in a different relationship to that. The first thing that is necessary is to find out what I am. This I have to do, as much as I can, impartially and gradually register in myself certain facts about myself which are irrefutable and which are absolute as far as I can make them. This requires, for me, a clear-cut observation of actions, of feelings and of thought.

If I can get a picture of myself as I am at the moment when I manifest, and I can become impartial to that, then I have something to work with. That is, if I can then in that way, if I could even for a short time remain more conscious than I am now, or rather, change from an unconscious to a little bit more conscious state, start by becoming in life - acting, that is, doing in a more conscious way what I have to do in ordinary life. It used to be called participation in ordinary life. I can then, as again the next step, trying to improve the possibilities of my life as a whole and the acquisition of certain dexterities, try to use then whatever the instrument is that I have which is now more truthful, remaining, as it were, observant, remaining impartial if I can, enlarge the total field of my experiences. These three steps I think are quite important to go through first, before I can even tackle or dare to think about conscious labor and intentional suffering.

It is logical however that whenever I work, whenever there are certain results deposited in me, whenever there is a possibility that there is something growing in me of, let's call it, more solidity, that then because of that, my level of being changes in the direction of an evolutionary aim. And it doesn't matter at what level of being I would have to be if I actually could think about practising conscious labor and intentional suffering. It will depend and go together with the knowledge that I acquire, the experience that I then will have by putting the knowledge to practise, and the actuality of understanding, which will affect my level of being, which is constantly a new level, also a change of my feeling regarding work. And it is much more in that direction that when my feeling starts to become such part of my being, wishing to live a different kind of life or fulfilling in my life a different function and meeting what Gurdjieff calls more and more the five rules of Objective Morality; that then, having this in mind, I would work consciously for that purpose, and create, also consciously, intentionally, certain conditions where I knew beforehand I would suffer. In that way, of course, I again could reach a different level of being, closer and closer to the possibility, as Gurdjieff explains it many times, the possibility of the acquisition of one's soul and the possibility of the completion of the Body Keesdjan in oneself.

I would almost say, it is far off. But even if we are not reaching the sun, it is already a wonderful thing to know that the sun exists and to go in that direction.

Miss Rosner:
(Pentland Group II)

The contradiction in me arises from the feeling of being in the work and yet feeling that I am at the periphery of the work.

Lord Pentland:

I don't know how you feel being in the work, whether you feel it as a help, or as a responsibility, whether you feel it as a consolation or as a trial, whether you feel it is possible or impossible.

In a way, we are all at the periphery of the work. We don't know what is the work, except at the moment when we know. And the point is that at that moment I am not alone, I am in the work with others and this work is in the world, connected with the world, so that there is no more question of consolation or help or possibility but things are just like that, and I see I have something to do at that very moment. I don't know whether you can feel it at all, - I don't know if you have an idea of what I am saying, but perhaps you can hear something of it while I am saying it. Perhaps it is at the moment all I can say.

Mrs. Levin:
(Wolfe Group I)

Could I conceive of being as to be in a different dimension of time, and doing as actualized being in space time?

Mr. Nyland:

I do not think so. Of course, I do not know what you understand by a different dimension of time. Have you any idea about it?

Mrs. Levin:

When I experience my presence in a moment, I have the feeling of a different dimension of time.

Mr. Nyland:

That is right. A moment could be a different dimension since it has no dimension. But of course it is not everything. I experience something at the moment. It does not last because time takes me away. I am back again in ordinary time duration. Whatever I am now, as being, I am subject to this time, this duration, this first dimension of time, unless I could live in the continuation of a moment in a different direction from the original time direction.

The easiest way to see it is if I have a vertical line at a point in a horizontal line, if it were possible for me to live in the vertical line, I would be independent of the horizontal line. Then I would live in a certain dimension of time, I can call it second if you like, but at least it would have different characteristics.

In order to compare it: If I live subjective life, living in objectivity could be compared to the vertical line drawn on my subjective living.

I would be doing all the time, either in a subjective way or in an objective way, but the motivation for the doing would come from a different place. So you see, this determines the characteristic of one's doing.

Doing belongs to a being at a certain level. The concentration of everything of me in one point: thinking, feeling and doing, having an aim of, let's say, becoming familiar with the existence of myself; if I do something with all my heart and my mind and whatever there is of my physical body, I have then, towards that, the possibility of becoming one regarding that what is my aim. This experience of oneness is a different kind of experience from any kind in ordinary life where I use no more than one and perhaps two of the centers and very seldom the three. If I wish to reach a different level of being, I first have to learn how to be whole, one unit. And this unit becomes, for me, in the time duration, the possibility of objectivity. This fusion process of becoming one is true for each level of being. And each level of being, when manifested, can express itself into its own doing, thinking and feeling.

Miss Hildred Brown:
(Pentland Group II)

It was said tonight that reaction is not effort. And I have always found a contradiction and a misunderstanding of myself in relation to doing. I never seem to understand why. Would this be a contradiction between being and doing?

Lord Pentland:

In any case, it is a true question for many of us. Either we don't or we won't recognize that reaction is not voluntary effort. We are not free from our functioning - we identify with our functioning, and so we don't see our functioning as reaction. I don't see my machine as a machine. I live in one function after another and I say I. But it is IT that reacts. And we find that something needs to be liberated. It seems to me that the approach to understanding that question, could be in seeing how meaningless most of my functioning is. The source of it comes, not from myself but from much higher. I don't initiate these reactions, they are part of the stream of creation which comes from above, from the highest. It is energy that comes from on high, and I have no right to confuse my initiative with these functionings. I am there to study them. I am there to understand how the highest manifests in my moving, in my thinking, in my feeling. And somehow, in that way I see that the functioning is included in my work. And that this way in which the highest manifests down through me is not the same way in which I try to find the wish to relate myself up toward the highest. There are two different streams.

Mr. J. Nott:

I find that I can't get further than the idea of being. Having my own understanding of levels of being in myself, limited by my experience, I see that there are different levels. I know that there are different levels of being. I have absolutely no conception of doing. This is what my question is, because I want to know whether doing can only be a manifestation of what I have experienced as being -- the highest that is possible for me.

Mr. Nyland:

Then do you believe that a being can do?

Mr. Nott:

I don't know.

Mr. Nyland:

Do you consider being a certain form of am-ness which exists and expresses itself? How do you look at being? You say you know in yourself different levels of being. Of course. I would almost say that every day you have a different level. Certainly as far as age is concerned, one acquires different levels of being dependent on one's insight, dependent on one's experiences and dependent on the results one achieves in ordinary life.

When you make an effort to wake up, would you consider that a question of doing? Making an effort means I do something. It is an expression of my life in a certain direction. And there is something in me that compels me to make an effort to try to wake up. How much of that effort is there, how strong it is, and when and at what time I can do, and under what circumstances, depends on the condition of my being. And my being again regulates what is my intensity of wish.

So all these things must be related. But I know this: that if I try to make an effort really to be present to myself, in accordance with the rules as required of remaining, as much as I can, impartial to that what I see, that then certain things take place in me which ultimately will become a different kind of understanding of my life. And with this understanding, which is parallel to the amount of knowledge that I have and which is then applied, giving me experiences, and because of the experience giving me the understanding, my level of actually being what I am, is, let's call it, enriched or at least changed into something that is of a higher or different quality.

This I am quite certain you must know. Because if you compare yourself with what you were ten years ago and what you are at the present time, and you are quiet within yourself, you come to a certain conclusion: This is what I am, and this is what I can do, and this I know I cannot do.

And when I am honest regarding myself of stating: These are the facts of my life, then I must know that at certain times I am better in the real sense of the word, better, that is, that I am more a man as compared to what I used to be.

I think one has to try to find the concept of one's own being simply by that consideration; and the consideration again based on an awareness - and only because at the time when I am aware and in that way awake, I can see what I have been when I was not awake. I think it is very important to make the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness. There is a difference, because otherwise we don't know what we are talking about. And if the aim is to wake up, it has a meaning in being. And if the experience is at times that I am awake, either accidentally or because of an effort, I have a different state in which I AM: a state I will not forget because I have an experience of an entirely different nature.

And I say, it is not nature as I know it on earth. It is as if, at such a time, Heaven is on Earth, and I am at that time part of it. And because of this experience which is unforgettable, it becomes indelibly inscribed in me, and then produces probably a wish again and again, as often as I possibly can, to try to make that kind of an effort. Only then such being starts to grow.

Mr. Nott:

I still don't understand doing in relation to just that.

Mr. Nyland:

The doing belongs to the being. That is, I am in ordinary life. I am on a certain level. I know a certain doing that belongs to ordinary life that is ordinary activity, whatever I do. There is something there that I, at the present time, wish to do regarding the possibility of growth. I say, because of having in mind an aim which is higher than where I live now, it already becomes tinted with that. It is still based on my ordinary wishes and my thought processes, but it has in it something which can lead to a different level - the level of being which could be reached, which Gurdjieff would call the Planetary Level, if you wish. The level of existence of the Kesdjan body has also a doing belonging to that level of being. From our standpoint, that level of being and that doing is different from the doing in ordinary life. But in relation to the level where it belongs, it is the same. It is a question of relativity. If I am at a higher level, I look at that what takes place

on the lower level from the standpoint of the higher level. When I am on the lower level and I wish for a higher level, I look at that with whatever my means are, lit up, as much as possible, by that what Gurdjieff calls the lights of Karatas. It is as if at such a time I become inspired by the possibility of reaching something which is not human - not human as we know it, but it is something that belongs to the possibility of the development of man. And then, because of that, that is the kind of being I wish, and for that I do. I make an effort. That is then, from the standpoint of Earth, Great Doing, because it is against ordinary Mother Nature.

Mr. Ebbole:
(Sutta Group II)

How does one begin?

Lord Pentland:

How does one begin in the direction of Great Doing?

Mr. Ebbole:

No. In the direction of making the effort one knows one should make and is unable.

Lord Pentland:

Yes. It is true that I always feel unable. But it is somewhere there in that contradiction that I actually am, I am unable to do, but I can watch. At the very moment when I feel unable, I could be watching myself. I could be trying to be present to myself there, aware of my functioning. And in a way, this is doing. It reacts, but I act, I do. And if I am present, if I am even making this effort to watch, to try to be present, what I see myself doing, is what I am doing, to start with.

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